

Poland

Facts and Statistics

Location: Central Europe

Capital: Warsaw

Climate: Temperate with cold, cloudy, moderately severe winters with frequent precipitation; mild summers with frequent showers and thundershowers

Population: 38,518,241 (July 2007 est.)

Ethnic Make-up: Polish 96.7%, German 0.4%, Belarusian 0.1%, Ukrainian 0.1%, other and unspecified 2.7% (2002 census)

Religions: Roman Catholic 89.8% (about 75% practicing), Eastern Orthodox 1.3%, Protestant 0.3%, other 0.3%, unspecified 8.3% (2002)

Government: Republic

Language(s) of Poland

Polish is the official language of Poland. It is spoken by most of the 38 million inhabitants of Poland (census 2002). There are also some native speakers of Polish in western Belarus and Ukraine, as well as in eastern Lithuania.

Polish has the second largest number of speakers among Slavic languages after Russian. It is the main representative of the Lechitic branch of the West Slavic languages. The Polish language originated in the areas of present-day Poland from several local Western Slavic dialects, most notably those spoken in Greater Poland and Lesser Poland. It shares some vocabulary with the languages of the neighboring Slavic nations, most notably with Slovak, Czech, Ukrainian, and Belarusian.

Polish Culture and Society

The Polish People - Poles

Poland is pretty much ethnically homogeneous. Ukrainian, Belorussian, Slovakian, and Lithuanian minorities reside along the borders. A German minority is concentrated near the southwest city of Opole. The capital and other cities are experiencing some inward migration from foreigners.

Religion

Religion plays an important role in the Polish society and is deeply intertwined with Polish culture.

Religious holidays are considered national holidays when most businesses are closed. The most important holiday is Christmas and celebrations last two and a half days. Poles practice "dzielenie opłatkiem" which is the breaking and sharing of a thin white wafer (oplatek) with all family members. While sharing the wafer, individuals express wishes of good health and prosperity for the coming year. This is also commonly practiced at work Christmas parties and is very much a part of Polish culture.

Another religious holiday of note is All Saints' Day which takes place on November 1st. On this day Poles visit cemeteries to honor their loved ones who have passed away.

Catholicism is the most widely practiced religion. Life's milestones such as weddings, baptisms, funerals, first communion and confirmation are influenced by the religion.

The Importance of Family

The family is the centre of the social structure. One's obligation is to the family first and foremost. Extended families are still the norm and really form an individual's social network.

Poles draw a line between their inner circle and outsiders. Family members are naturally part of the inner circle along with close friends, usually "family friends". Poles will interact differently with their inner circle and outsiders. The inner circle forms the basis of a person's social and business network. The people from the inner circle can be relied upon to: offer advice, help find a job, cut through bureaucracy, or even rent an apartment. There is an elaborate etiquette of extending favors and using contacts to get things done